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UZBEKISTAN

SUCCESS STORY

Farmers Gain Voice in the Management of Irrigation Systems

USAID-funded Water Users Association Support Program encourages grass-roots participation in Uzbekistan.



USAID/Uz photo

WUA members casting their vote.

Through democratic elections Association members now have a voice in the management decisions that directly impact their lives and their most precious resource, water.

Farming in Uzbekistan is almost totally reliant on irrigation systems. In the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union, on-farm irrigation canals have fallen into a widespread state of disrepair. The USAID-funded Water Users Association Support Program has been helping create and strengthen water users associations (WUAs), through which farmers could effectively operate, manage, and make the necessary investment decisions to maintain and improve their on-farm irrigation and drainage systems.

USAID is currently working with 10 WUAs, which benefit over 75,000 people. The WUA Support Program helps water users associations to set up a process to elect association representatives and to institute a management system that is transparent and responsive to the needs of members. Association members now have the opportunity to influence the WUA activities through direct participation. Association members meet periodically to voice concerns and approve management decisions regarding finances, plans, and association management rules.

Azima Khusainova, a member of the “Yurtim Istiqlol” pilot water users association, said: ‘Our association’s management used to be appointed by government bodies. Consequently, members of the association did not know budget details nor any management plans. The WUA Support Program helped set up democratic elections of the managing body of the association, the WUA Council. Using the new process, our association has recently elected experienced and trustworthy farmers to the new WUA Council. Because of it, we now have more trust in the WUA management and the financial transparency of the funds. All farmers understand that the establishment of water users associations according to democratic principles is an important initiative for reforming the irrigation sector in Uzbekistan’.